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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Summary record of the 274th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 9 October 2003, at 11.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Fall ..... (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.35 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Report by the Chairman on the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, held on 4 and 5 September 2003, at United Nations Headquarters, New York

2. **The Chairman** said that the Conference had coincided with yet another escalation of confrontation and violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which had brought the political process to a halt. The Israeli Government had decided to construct a separation barrier, large segments of which would cut deeply into the Palestinian Territory. Accordingly, the Plan of Action adopted at the close of the Conference put the focus of civil society initiatives on mobilizing worldwide action against the construction of the separation wall, and participants had sent a letter in that regard to the Secretary-General and the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

3. The theme, "End the Occupation", had provided the common denominator for a diverse group of over 140 civil society organizations, including Palestinian and Israeli groups, American-Arab and American-Jewish organizations, and Christian, Muslim and Jewish organizations, all of whom were in agreement that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land must end. Governmental delegations, intergovernmental organizations, media representatives and students had also attended.

4. In addition to the speeches, there had been a screening of two documentaries and an exhibit showing the repercussions of the construction of the separation wall on the Palestinian population. All plenary sessions had been shown on United Nations Television and webcast on the United Nations web site. The report of the Conference would be issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights, and copies of the Plan of Action and the letter to the Secretary-General had been posted on the Division's "Question of Palestine" web site.

5. Members of the Steering Committee of the Conference had done an excellent job and had also taken it upon themselves to form an international coordinating network of non-governmental organizations on Palestine to follow up on the proposed initiatives. In that laudable endeavour, they were asking the Committee for its cooperation.

Consideration of the draft report of the Committee to the General Assembly (A/AC.183/2003/CRP.2)

6. **Mr. Camilleri** (Rapporteur) introduced the draft report of the Committee, which provided an update on developments on the ground and on efforts to resume the political process. The draft report outlined the Committee's objectives and general perspective on the events of the past year, summarized the General Assembly mandates given to the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information and reviewed in some detail the situation on the ground and actions taken by the Committee to promote Palestinian rights in the United Nations. It also gave an account of the implementation of the work of the Committee and the Division, and the work of the Department of Public Information.

7. In its conclusions and recommendations, the Committee expressed concern at the lack of serious headway in the political process and emphasized that the United Nations should maintain permanent responsibility with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine until it was satisfactorily resolved in accordance with United Nations resolutions. It also stressed the critical peacemaking role of the Security Council and called upon the Security Council and the General Assembly to stop the de facto annexation of Palestinian land and the construction of the wall.

8. **The Chairman** apologized for the fact that the draft report was available only in English. Once it was adopted, it would be translated into all the official languages. In view of the constantly changing and tense situation on the ground, it might be necessary to update the report.

9. He invited the Committee to consider the report chapter by chapter.

10. *Chapters I to VII were adopted.*

11. *The draft report as a whole was adopted.*

Developments in the Middle East peace process and the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem

12. **The Chairman** said that, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee, he had made a statement

during the Security Council debate of 16 September 2003 on a draft resolution which would inter alia have demanded that Israel cease any threat to the safety of the President of the Palestinian Authority. The draft resolution had not been adopted because one permanent member of the Council had cast a negative vote.

13. **Mr. Al-Kidwa** (Observer for Palestine) said that the Palestinian position on action that the General Assembly should take at the current session — endorsed by both the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference — had been circulated to all Member States. The Palestinian Authority put priority on enforcing and updating past resolutions; ensuring that the Israeli credentials, when approved, were expressly understood as not applying to the Occupied Territory, including Jerusalem, a point endorsed also by the African Union; taking more forceful action against the Israeli war crimes of the past three years; and calling for the dismantling of the separation wall that Israel was constructing.

14. At its meeting on 16 September 2003, the Security Council had considered a draft resolution demanding that Israel desist from any act of deportation and cease any threat to the safety of the elected President of the Palestinian Authority; the draft resolution had not been adopted because the United States exercised its veto. On 19 September 2003, the General Assembly at its resumed tenth emergency special session had succeeded in adopting a similar draft resolution (A/ES-10/L.12). The overwhelming number of votes in favour of the resolution reflected the true position of the international community.

15. At their latest meeting on 26 September, the Quartet members had held tense discussions on the situation in the Middle East, in the course of which they had reaffirmed the need for both parties to implement the road map and for Israel to cease all settlement activity. The summary read out after the meeting on behalf of the Quartet had not been balanced, reflecting as it did the position of one member only; but in his personal remarks at the time, the Secretary-General had said that bold steps in keeping with the road map were now necessary to salvage peace. No doubt he had had in mind an earlier proposal for a robust international force mandated by the Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

16. His delegation had requested an immediate meeting of the Security Council to consider the separation wall; the Non-Aligned Movement was at that very moment discussing a proposed draft resolution on the matter. The moment of truth had come: either Israel stopped undermining the Palestinian State and the possibility of peace, or it was the end of a two-State solution and the start of a perpetual conflict. The inauguration of a new Palestinian Cabinet by the Legislative Council of the Palestinian Authority could conceivably pave the way for whatever steps were still possible for a resumption of the peace process. Yet the situation was bleak.

17. **The Chairman** said that the Committee must reflect and act upon a number of the important points raised by the Observer for Palestine, particularly those relating to the separation wall, whose construction could only lead to an explosive situation, and the threats against President Arafat's life.

18. He drew attention to an article that had appeared in *The International Herald Tribune* on 6 September 2003, written by an Israeli former Speaker of the Knesset and current Labour Party deputy, Avraham Burg, in which he recognized the desperation, humiliation and hatred that fuelled the Palestinian suicide bombings and condemned the Israeli Government for abandoning ethical leadership, refusing to evacuate all settlements and establish internationally recognized borders, and for the racism that was undermining Israeli democracy and the Jewish State itself.

Other matters

19. **The Chairman** recalled that the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People would be commemorated on 1 December 2003.

20. He informed the Committee that two members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority would be participating in the Committee's 2003 training programme for Palestinian professional staff, and would be working with the Division for Palestinian Rights during the current session of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.